



PHOTO: AFP
Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati (R) shakes hands with Telugu Desam Party (TDP) president Chandrababu Naidu (L) after a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. Naidu met Mayawati and Left leaders as part of the effort of the parties opposed to the nuclear deal to muster support for the trust vote.

Close call for Manmohan govt as trust vote looms

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The future of Congress-led UPA government and a controversial atomic energy deal with Washington hang in the balance with the coalition facing a confidence vote on Tuesday seen as being too close to call.

The embattled ruling coalition yesterday ramped up its efforts to shore up the number needed to win the trust vote in Lok Sabha on Tuesday over the nuclear deal with US.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi asked her party MPs Saturday to put up a united face to ensure the government's victory in the trial of strength.

Sonia met Congress MPs in batches at her 10, Janpath residence as the party managers strug-

gled to rustle up the magical figure of 271 required for the survival of the coalition in 543-member Lok Sabha.

In the number game, ruling UPA still appeared to be short of a dozen MPs for simple majority in Lok Sabha and is heavily banking on small parties like the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), National Conference and JD(S).

With barely two days left for the crucial vote, political manoeuvring gained momentum with some MPs coming out openly to say that they would defy their party whips.

These included one each from Congress and Samajwadi Party besides two from MDMK, who have threatened not to toe the party line.

In a blow to UPA, Samajwadi Party General Secretary Shahid Siddiqui quit the party and joined

BSP headed by Mayawati and announced he would vote against the government in the trust vote.

A Congress MP Arvind Sharma from Haryana attacked the party and the government for "targeting" BSP chief Mayawati and indicated he might vote against the trust motion.

However, Congress sources said efforts were underway to persuade him to support the government.

After her day-long interaction, Sonia Gandhi hosted a dinner for party MPs as also those of UPA constituents Saturday.

This will be followed by a dinner today by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Leader of the Opposition LK Advani will also be hosting a dinner for all NDA MPs at his residence today, while TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu has convened

an informal meet of his party MPs on Sunday night.

Congress yesterday ruled out the Prime Minister's resignation ahead of the trust vote claiming he will sail through comfortably.

Seeking to scotch speculation that Singh may have to step down before the July 22 vote of confidence in Lok Sabha if the UPA fell short of a simple majority, Congress spokesman M Veerappa Mally said "the question does not arise as he will win the trust vote comfortably".

But several UPA leaders conceded in private that it will be a "close call". Besides not knowing which way certain small groups and independents will vote, the UPA is also worried about ensuring that its flock stays together and there is no cross voting.

BJP to airlift ailing MPs for trust vote

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

They are seriously unwell, strapped to their hospital beds and need constant medical care. But for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), their vote is crucial to topple the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in Tuesday's floor test.

So some of the MPs are being flown to New Delhi, bandage and all, and some on stretchers.

The first MP to cause worry was BJP veteran Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who has not been keeping well for the past few months and has also not made any public appearances.

Amid speculation that he would not be able to vote, the party sought special permission for him. Vajpayee will be casting his vote in the parliament lobby.

The next to create a flutter was 57-year-old Harishandra Chavan, an MP from Malegaon in

Maharashtra. Seriously injured in an accident, Chavan has been bedridden and is immobilised. He is undergoing treatment in a Nashik hospital since June 10.

The party is planning to fly Chavan to Delhi, ignoring his doctor's advice. His family is also worried about moving the injured MP, but party leaders have assured them of all kinds of medical facilities and that moving him would not harm his condition.

That is not all. Bollywood actor-turned-politician Dharmendra has undergone a knee surgery in Los Angeles. When it seemed that the MP from Bikaner in Rajasthan might give the vote a miss, BJP leaders pressed the panic button. Dharmendra has been told to rush back to India and to vote against Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government.

The actor has said he will consult his doctors.

Indo-Pak officials strike accord to expand LoC contacts

THE DAWN, Islamabad

Pakistan and India have agreed to expand 'people-to-people contacts' for Kashmiris on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) and worked out modalities for intra-Kashmir trade and a Muzaffarabad-Srinagar truck service.

A joint statement issued at the conclusion of a meeting of the Pakistan-India Working Group on Cross-LoC CBMs on Friday said talks were held in "a cordial and constructive atmosphere".

Both sides discussed modalities for implementing the decisions taken by their foreign ministers in their meeting on May 21 and reviewed measures to ensure effective implementation of the existing confidence-building measures, it said.

Sources in the Foreign Office and the Indian High Commission said a breakthrough had been achieved in the talks but an announcement about it would be made next week by the foreign secretaries of the two countries at their meeting in New Delhi.

"Both sides were very happy at the progress and made a lot of efforts for the success of the meeting," they said.

The sources claimed that progress had been made on the CBMs proposed by Pakistan at a meeting between Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and his Indian counterpart Pranab Mukherjee. The proposals include simplifying the procedure for issuing cross-LoC

travel permits, increasing the frequency of the Muzaffarabad-Srinagar bus service, launching a postal service between the two cities and expediting the cases of inadvertent crossings of the LoC.

The two sides discussed the list of items to be allowed to be traded through the truck service. They also deliberated on ways of consolidating the existing CBMs.

The Pakistani delegation was headed by Foreign Office Director General Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry and the Indian side by External Affairs Joint Secretary T.C.A. Raghavan.

Raghavan also called on Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir.

APP adds from New Delhi: An official of Pakistan High Commission said the issues of Kashmir and peace and security would be on the agenda when the foreign secretaries of the two countries would meet for the fifth round of the Composite Dialogue on Monday. He said Mr Bashir would arrive in New Delhi on Sunday for talks with his Indian counterpart Shivshankar Menon.

He will also call on LK Advani, the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, and the Indian external affairs minister.

According to PTV, more than 4,000 passengers from Azad Kashmir travelled to occupied Kashmir through the Muzaffarabad-Srinagar bus service since its launch on April 7, 2007, and more than 3,000 people from occupied Kashmir visited Azad Kashmir.

10 Taliban militants killed in Pak clashes

AP, Peshawar

At least 10 Taliban have died in fierce fighting between two rival militant groups in northwestern Pakistan, a government official and Taliban spokesman said Saturday.

Hundreds of supporters of the top Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud clashed Friday with a break-away faction of the group in Mohmand tribal region, said local administrator Syed Ali.

He said both sides used rocket-propelled grenades and other weapons in the fighting, which lasted for several hours. Between 10 and 15 men died, he said.

A spokesman for Mehsud's group, who identified himself as Dr Asad, claimed they killed 15 militants of the rival group and captured 120 others, including their top commander Shah Khalid, and would try them under Islamic laws.

Asad claimed that Khalid was receiving support from the government.

Ali refused to comment on that

claim, and no representative of Khalid's group could immediately be reached to verify it.

Mehsud is the leader of a militant umbrella group, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, and he has been accused in the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, which he denies. His supporters are believed responsible for numerous bomb blasts and attacks on security forces in the country's tribal regions and other areas over the past year.

The government led by Bhutto's party installed after winning Feb. 18 elections has encouraged peace talks involving Mehsud group and other militant outfits, which has quelled violence.

But Mehsud this week blamed the provincial government in Pakistan's northwest for recent military operations against militants and threatened to attack it unless it quit by Tuesday. The provincial government has rejected the demand, saying it only called in troops after Mehsud's men killed 17 Pakistani soldiers near the town of Zargari last week.

9 Indian soldiers killed in Kashmir explosion

AFP, Srinagar

Nine Indian soldiers were killed and 16 others injured in a landmine blast yesterday in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, the army said.

The attack was the deadliest since India and Pakistan started a peace process in January 2004 to resolve their disputes, including the one on Kashmir.

"We have nine fatalities," Indian army spokeswoman Neha Goel told AFP.

She said over dozen others were hurt in the explosion in Narabal on the outskirts of Indian Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar.

A police officer confirmed nine had died and 16 others were hurt when their bus drove over the mine.

The soldiers were travelling from Uri, bordering Pakistan-

administered Kashmir, to Indian army's main headquarters in Srinagar.

The blast ripped through the military bus, turning it on its side, and shattered the windows of six other vehicles, witnesses said.

Nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan hold the region in part but claim it in full, and have fought two of their three wars over the region.

Pakistan denies Indian allegations that it is behind a Muslim insurgency directed at New Delhi's rule.

Although violence has declined since the peace process was launched, incidents have increased in recent months.

Early this month six Indian soldiers and 12 militants were killed in a long-drawn gunbattle along the Line of Control, the highly militarised border dividing Kashmir.



PHOTO: AFP
Former rebel leader and chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal Maoist Pushpa Kamal Dahal, known as Prachanda, (L) and Baburam Bhattarai (R) prepare to cast their votes to elect the country's first president at the Constitutional Assembly Building in Kathmandu yesterday. But the Nepali assembly has failed to elect the president on Saturday.

Afghan forces search for kidnapped aid workers

AFP, Ghazni

Authorities were Saturday searching for two French aid workers kidnapped in central Afghanistan, but the Taliban denied capturing them.

The Action Against Hunger (Action Contre la Faim) workers were taken from their guest house in the early hours of Friday in the central province of Day Kundi, their Paris-based organisation has said.

"We have no news on their fate," provincial governor Sultan Ali Uruzgani told AFP. "Our security forces have been searching for them."

The interior ministry in the capital Kabul said it did not know who had taken them.

"Day Kundi does not see a strong infiltration of insurgents and terrorists," ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashary told AFP.

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INVITATION FOR BIDS (2ND RE-TENDER)

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- Tender Documents will be issued only to the contractors or their authorized representatives who will apply for issue to Tender Document as under para-1 above on cash payment of Tk. 2,000/- (Taka two thousand) only from Accounts Department of FILIC at T K Bhaban (13th Floor), 13 Kawran Bazar, Dhaka-1215, from 19.07.2008 to 19.08.2008 during office hours.
- A pre-bid meeting will be held on 27.07.2008 at 11:00 AM.
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WALK IN INTERVIEW

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